

Corporate recruiters say they're on the lookout for veterans

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WASHINGTON — Corporate recruiters have stepped up their efforts to hire veterans in recent years, seeking their experience and reliability, a panel of business executives told House members on Wednesday.

The hearing was designed both to highlight military-friendly private companies and to reassure troops about their ability to find employment after leaving the service, according to the chairman of the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs, Rep. Steve Buyer, R-Ind.

The business officials said that while patriotism and appreciation have prompted some of their veterans hiring efforts, the main impetus behind the recruiting has been the skills and leadership of former servicemembers.

"Many of the railroad's technical jobs are well-suited for military members who have developed similar skills working with large equipment in the armed forces," said William Behrendt, a human resources executive with Union Pacific Railroad.

"In addition, lifestyles and working conditions are also similar, military personnel tend to be flexible when it comes to relocation, and they are typically safety-conscious and rules-oriented."

Union Pacific has hired several thousand veterans in recent years and hopes even more will make up a significant piece of the 15,000 jobs it will fill over the next five years. Behrendt said the company has spent 12 percent of its recruiting advertising budget on military-oriented publications and assigned five new employee recruiters to military accounts.

General Electric has hired more than 400 veterans a year every year since 2000. Marc Chini, vice president of human resources for GE Infrastructure, said nearly 75 percent of those hires have been enlisted military, and the company has built a veteran recruiting team to help interview potential employees.

Members of the committee noted that government-run efforts to hire veterans have seen success in recent years. Federal departments and 47 states have pledged support to the Hire Vets First campaign, designed to place retired military in public-sector jobs.

More than 137,000 troops have received job-search help through transition assistance programs. In the last year 75 severely injured troops have been placed in similar posts through the Department of Labor's Real Lifelines program, and another 59 are in the process of being placed.

But committee members noted that private-sector success has been more erratic, with some firms embracing retired military or reservists as a valuable workforce and others turning away.

Dennis Donovan, a human resources executive with Home Depot, said part of the issue is the difficulty firms have in reaching veterans. His company has partnered with the Defense Department, the Labor Department and the Department of Veterans Affairs to develop a system of identifying potential recruits and contacting them, but that complexity might scare away some businesses.

Home Depot hired more than 17,000 veterans nationwide in 2005, and has seen nearly 2,000 employees called to active duty as reservists over the last three years.

Donovan said they now make their job openings known through VA and Defense Department, to encourage more military to apply.

"These veterans need to strut their stuff," he said. "Most of our employees don't have college degrees. Folks with military experience need to focus on their strengths: leadership, discipline, and training they've received in things like electrical work.

"If they do that, they'll get into a job in no time."

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